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Sec. 4.01.2 The Santage Point
Only under Johnson

Johnson Tells of That Dallas Day With the Details as He Saw Them

This is the first of 12 articles excerpted from LBJ's book, "The Vantage Point."

By LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON

"We're going to carry two states next year if we don't carry any others: Massachusetts and Texas."

The speaker was John F. Kennedy.

The time was Friday morning, Nov. 22, 1963.

I had gone to the President's eighth-floor suite in the Hotel Texas in Fort Worth to introduce my younger sister, Lucia Alexander, to him.

The President's spirits were high. He had come to Texas for politics, and the trip so far was successful — much more successful than I had expected. He had been warmly received everywhere he went.

THAT MORNING in Fort Worth he had already made two speeches, one to a large gathering in a parking lot across the street from the hotel, another to a chamber of commerce breakfast. Money and power were represented at the breakfast, but the parking lot audience — made up of workers, mothers, and children — gave me more assurance about the mood of Texas. Many of them had waited in a steady drizzle for more than an hour to hear him and to see Mrs. Kennedy.

"Where's Jackie?" someone in the crowd shouted.

"Mrs. Kennedy is organizing herself," the President said. "It takes longer, but of course she looks better than we do when she does it." The crowd loved this, and roared its approval.

Now it was time to leave for Dallas. John Kennedy was thinking about the future, about the approaching presidential campaign and the necessity for carrying Texas. No one, including the President, considered his reelection to be a cinch. In fact, the President's ratings in the polls were as low as they had ever been.

The polls may have given him cause for gloom, but the people certainly did not.

That was obviously what he was thinking about when he remarked to me, cheerfully, that we would at least carry Massachusetts and Texas. They were the last words John Kennedy spoke to me.

WE WERE scheduled to fly that afternoon from Dallas to Austin for a fund-raising dinner. That night the Kennedys were going to be our guests at the LBJ Ranch. We were eagerly looking forward to the visit.

Mrs. Johnson and I arrived at Dallas' Love Field aboard Air Force Two at 11:35 a.m. We joined the reception line to welcome the First Family when Air Force One touched down five minutes later.

There was a large, joyful crowd behind the fence, and when the Kennedys stepped out of the plane a great roar went up from thousands of throats. I remember thinking how radiant Mrs. Kennedy looked. The skies had cleared, the air was warm and the sun bright. Her pink suit and pink hat added to the beauty of the day. Someone in the reception line added the final touch by presenting her with a bouquet of dark red roses.

We took seats in the automobiles to begin the motorcade through town to the Trade Mart, where the President was scheduled to make a luncheon speech. President and Mrs. Kennedy got into the big presidential Lincoln. Gov. John Connally of Texas and his wife, Nellie, were in the jump seats directly in front of them. On orders of the President, the famous "bubble top" had been removed from the car. It was a beautiful day and the President wanted no barriers between himself and the people.

In the front seat of our car were the driver, a Texas highway patrolman named Hurchel Jacks, and the Secret Service agent in charge of my detail, Rufus Youngblood. I was sitting in the right rear seat, Lady Bird

was in the left rear seat, directly behind the driver. It was approximately 11:55 a.m.

As we drove through the less populated areas, the crowds were thin. But I recall that even then the three of us commented on the visible enthusiasm of the people along the route and their obvious good wishes. Dallas has never been exactly a citadel of Democratic politics.

I had been worried about this visit — worried about the political climate; worried about the problems we might encounter.

A great deal has been written about the purpose of that fateful trip to Texas. Much of what has been written is wrong.

President Kennedy came to Texas to raise money for the Democratic campaign coffers and to pave the way for a Democratic victory in Texas in 1964. We were soon to be involved in a presidential election. We would need millions of dollars for the campaign, and the Democratic National Committee was still painfully in debt. The President hoped to raise several hundred thousand dollars in Texas.

SHORTLY BEFORE 12:30 p.m. the motorcade turned right on Houston Street and then a block later made a sharp left turn on Elm Street, which would take us through the underpass and on to Stemmons Freeway, to the Trade Mart.

We were traveling about ten or fifteen miles per hour.

Just after our car made the left turn at the top of Elm, I was startled by an explosion.

In the reading I have done since that day of horror, it is apparent that there were many reactions to the first shot. Some people thought it was a bomb. Some thought it was a truck back-

firing. Some thought it might be a shot. Some were positive it was a shot.

I did not know what it was.

Agent Youngblood spun around, shoved me on the shoulder to push me down, and shouted to all of us, "Get down!" Almost in the same movement, he vaulted over the seat, pushed me to the floor, and sat on my right shoulder to keep me down and to protect me. Agent Youngblood's quick reaction was as brave an act as I have ever seen anyone perform. When a man, without a moment's thought or hesitation, places himself between you and a possible assassin's bullet, you know you have seen courage. And you never forget it.

I still was not clear about what was happening. I was bent down under the weight of Agent Youngblood's body, toward Lady Bird and Senator Yarborough, and I remember turning my head to make sure that they were both down. They were. Agent Youngblood had seen to that.

At some time in this sequence of events, I heard other explosions.

Then a voice came crackling over the radio system: "Let's get out of here."

Suddenly our car accelerated and we wheeled around the corner, careening over the curb — almost, it seemed to me, on two wheels. I was later told that we were traveling between seventy and eighty miles per hour.

There was some frantic conversation coming over Youngblood's radio and I heard him speaking into it several times. I asked him what had happened. He released his weight from me but still kept me in a crouching position on the floor. He was not sure but that he had heard that the motorcade was headed for a hospital.